

Jennifer Chick

EDU 402

Dr. Grace

11/21/13

### Philosophy Statement

I have been developing as a teacher my whole life. I started, as many do, in the role of a student. But, unlike many others, at an early age I began to analyze what the teacher was actually doing, and how it was effective. Like many students, both effective and non-effective teaching methods have crossed my path, but I started learning how to supplement for the less effective methods early on. In other words, I began teaching myself. I have always taken education seriously and believed that it is one of the most influential factors of someone's life. Because of that, I have always been focused on making sure that for myself and those around me, working to make education its best is essential. I was seventeen when I realized that teaching might be a good field for me to go into. I was applying for college and I decided that regardless of what I wanted to do, I always envisioned myself sharing knowledge and ideas with others in hopes of bettering our future.

Since then, my goals have not changed, but my perspective certainly has. I was the typical brown-nosing, goody-two-shoes student, always doing what my teacher told me and voicing my opinions when I felt they had value to the entire classroom community. Within the first few weeks of taking an education class, I quickly realized this was not an effective way to approach teaching. Teaching requires innovation, creativity, meaningful relationships, connections to anything and everything, and most of all, a passion for working with our society's

youth. While I feel that I had all of these abilities in my first education class, I never considered applying them to my classroom.

Upon realizing these key points, I reconfirmed why I wanted to be an English teacher. Previously I had seriously considered math or health as equal areas of interest. I've always been really successful at helping others understand math, and I love the idea of promoting better holistic and individual wellness. So, why English? Because I believe that it can be used to the fullest extent to accomplish all of those requirements. I believe that English, when applied constructively, can be what some programs are missing. It can be used to fill in the gaps between connecting other subjects, stretching the students into the community (for things other than observation and community service), giving students the tools and strategies they need to delve deeper into any content. In this way, I believe that I can teach any student, but what they will learn is hard to determine.

Perhaps it is obvious but I am a pragmatist at heart. I firmly believe in a student-based educational platform, where the teacher becomes more of a guide on their journey through learning about the world around them. Community is an integral piece into the way a student functions inside and outside of the classroom. I believe that through connections to their community and the world far beyond it, students will discover what true engagement is all about and will become life-long learners, as well as productive and useful citizens. This is not to say that I don't find the value in an individualistic learning approach. I think that independent work is great, so long as the independence is led by the student, not expected of them. I think every student should be responsible for framing and developing their learning and that every student gains something different from every experience. Pacing and personal connections will be something that student is in charge in. I expect that we will discuss things about discipline in the

classroom, and work together to find solutions to problems that we find. I think that coming from an educational age that relied heavily upon good listeners and limited interactions, I would like to approach my students as people who also have things to share.

Each subject, though unique, have extreme cross overs, and what student doesn't benefit from reinforcement of ideas? Like John Dewey, I believe that an interdisciplinary approach is what builds strong and lasting foundations of learning, and that this also takes away from isolation students. I also think that every student needs to explore new ways of learning, either through hands on application, digital interaction, group efforts and so on. Getting out of your comfort zone helps you grow as a learner, and gives you new tools you might need later.

In order to accomplish all of the inter-connectivity, interdisciplinary work that I envision with my students, I will need to be extremely organized. Although this means I will have to have my curriculum planned in advance, I see it being easy to update and keep track of. I imagine much of this will occur through the online programs I intend to use, like a virtual classroom, discussion pages, blogs, Goodreads, Wikis, Lore, Google+, and maybe things like Twitter and other social media sites. Part of the technology integration will depend on the comfort level of my students and their willingness to gain new responsibility in a world where everything happens faster. I expect that my students will work together to help determine the general set up the classroom on a day to day basis. I see that it is likely I will use some type of projector, to allow us to share things, especially as a way to start off class and set the tone for the day. I see whiteboards as being part of what I'd need to give reminders and occasionally notes or instruction, but generally I don't see myself in the front of the classroom, or even in the center of the conversation. Because I am a firm believer in using English, and the skills you gain through it to connect to other subjects, topics, and interests, my students will be motivated by a more

practical usage of their skills. Some days that may mean submitting a persuasive essay to the newspaper about a current issue, or writing a handbook from the student view and presenting it to the administration. Not only will these connections to their community create action and agency with the products of their work, but it will also mean that assessment is likely to be trickier. By embracing programs like Project Based Learning and Mass Customized Learning in my classroom, I see that a lot of the time, students will be working on different things, at different paces. However, I do see the value in doing some things as a whole class. Again, this is where organization comes into play. If my classroom is run this way, it will have to be standards based, and for things that are not whole class, clear guidelines, and expectations will need to be communicated to each student in order for them to understand what needs to be accomplished in order to pass. I believe that giving and working with the students to understand the standards is to best way to approach that. I also believe that if they are connecting things to other content areas, they will be completing many of the standards multiple times. I feel that this is crucial in showing proficiency of a standard, instead of judging it based on one application of their knowledge. I think that the learning focus will shift constantly, but my goal is to make it authentic. I'm thoroughly troubled by our country's lessened ability to read and write well, so those will be a continuous focus, even if they are informal and not connected to the standard specifically. By making authentic connections, I hope to help students develop these skills more naturally and not just to complete some test.

Good teachers, or what I consider to be good teachers, are people who are not in charge of forcing learning, but rather helping each student learn in their own way and teaching them how to do that best. This relates directly to my views on incorporating Mass Customized Learning (MCL) into the classroom. Though I have concerns about the way MCL will function in an

English classroom, as opposed to any other content, I think that there are ways to make it work. Many of them I have already mentioned. I fear isolation of students, especially when some of the goals of an English classroom are about collaboration to gain understanding. If every student is working at their own pace, and is tackling different standards at different times, when is it appropriate to bring them all together to tackle something like a Shakespearian play? My major idea is that MCL needs to be molded into, and compromised with, some of the more traditional approaches, like whole-class novels.

As for Project Based Learning (PBL) or Service Learning, I'm absolutely interested in integrating these into my lessons as much as possible. I feel that getting students invested in their learning can be done best through these approaches. PBL, from my experiences, has been extremely beneficial in helping students progress from students to life-long learners. In my junior year of college, I had the privilege to go back to the area's high school and work with 15 sophomores in their four core classes. Almost everything that we did was PBL and the students became more invested and engaged in their learning, they made deeper connections with themselves and the contents, and they began to develop skills of someone responsible for their own learning. Compared to MCL, I find PBL much more accessible because it can be used on a lesson-to-lesson basis. It also doesn't require the same amount of training for the learner, and by that I mean that any student could participate in this style of learning without previous skills. I do not believe this is the case with MCL.

All of this really relates to my agreement with progressivism and constructivism. I think that students should be investigating their surroundings through development of questions. Although I'm not a huge fan of the word 'experimenting' to find the answer to these questions, I believe that essentially that's what students need to do in order to further explore the ever-

changing world around them. I think that in some ways, especially the constructivist terms, my goal is that students will gain personal meaning through their exploration. However, I think that this can only be accomplished if the student is aware of how to conduct their learning, which is one of the reasons I'm a supporter of progressivism. I think that the progressivist idea of having flexibility in your curriculum speaks directly to my personal values, despite that in some ways this contradicts my support of MCL. I think that the classroom is a place to promote the functions of our society, such as democracy. I want students to have a say in their environment and learn that sticking up for your beliefs actually helps solidify them, which can be a meaningful experience. This follows W.E.B. DuBois' philosophy. I want students to become more of the activists that our society needs, instead of the apathetic group they are becoming known for. I think DuBois' quote, "Education and work are the levers to uplift a people. Work alone will not do it unless inspired by the right ideals and guided by intelligence. Education must not simply teach work---it must teach Life," helps support this.

There are a lot of things that I'm concerned about in the future of education. I think we're headed toward a major shift in the way we teach and I don't think the community will be as receptive. Change can be scary. I also think that the needs of students are changing, and that I might not be well qualified to help meet those needs. More than anything, I fear that education will become even less important to the public than it is today. Our world is shifting to highlight the individual, the unique qualities that make a person, and with a view that monotony is the norm, I fear that education will soon be disregarded as unhelpful and a waste of this fast moving culture's time. I think technology can be a large part of the problem, but it can also be part of the solution; it all depends on how productively it's being used. Because of this, I feel that it is something I should constantly be reassessing in my classroom to ensure that there is a balance. I

think it's also important to recognize that what I consider to be productive technology usage will not necessarily be the same for my students.

I think in any situation having a good attitude is important. A good attitude, not necessarily a positive one, can allow me to be adaptable and receptive to the needs of my students. It will keep the atmosphere of my classroom warm and inviting and model good attributes for my students. Even in bad situations, taking a moment to appreciate what is right in front of you can help. Attitude is what keeps you encouraging your student and not letting too much of the negative get in the way of being productive. I think it's important to remember this in the face of any scary changes that come my way.

I want to bring all of this into any school that I become a part of. I hope to use my love for community and promotion of activism to shift my school district towards a more productive learning experience. What I mean by that is I want my students to not only learn the content, but be able to project it into the world and apply it to their real lives. Without these connections I feel that education becomes meaningless. I also want to community itself to make regular appearances inside the school and the classroom. Politicians should have the comfort level of walking in and not only talking about the bill they're pushing, but also what type of writing goes into it, how they came into this profession, and what they think are some things about our school that need change. Small business owners should be invited to help students understand finances, advertising, appropriate social connections and what types of higher education they benefitted from. Mechanics should be able to come in and discuss customer service, safety in the garage, and what steps they take to use hands on learning to their full advantage. These people have just as much ability to empower young minds and help them develop personal connections to the real world.

I want my students to become increasingly familiar with things that they do well and things that they don't, and by recognizing these differences I want them to begin to determine in what ways they are useful to society. I want to bring projects outside the classroom to show the world what young adults are capable and to empower students to fight for the change they want. I think English is an excellent place to start.

One of the struggles I see myself facing in the future is the lack of positive and personal emphasis people today put on reading. Students today are constantly brushing over the depth of knowledge they could gain from a simple page of reading for a paragraph version highlighted on Wikipedia. I'm hoping to find a school and a district that are willing to support using reading to break beyond these skimming-the-surface problems our society's educational programs are already facing. I see reading as being the gateway to learning. First, I think that any and all teachers should become familiar with what type of readers they have in their classrooms. We have to work together as a school to actively pursue our students' reading needs. Second, every teacher should be sharing what they read in their spare time, and even subtly be talking about the benefits they see from reading. I think promoting personal choice in reading materials will be essential in the beginning. This will help students foster a love and connection with literature that can't come directly from a classroom. I want to see teachers then begin to recommend books for their students, based on what they understand to be their interests in reading. Finally, I want students to be constantly practicing their reading strategies, because many, if not all, will be beneficial in other subjects in school, but also in the students' future roles as citizens.

Reading and reading strategies help develop tools that learners need to succeed, such as questioning or inferring. Also, people who are well read are generally better writers because they've seen more examples of appropriate writing and they become more familiar at analyzing



what types of writing are appropriate in different contexts. Reading needs to be more about the standardized tests that every school is being pushed to take. When I was in seventh grade, I was already an avid reader, but I had a teacher who continued to talk to me about it. This was the first time I had a teacher who didn't just gloss over me because I already knew how to read beyond grade level. She had each of us keep track of our reading in our own journals. When we turned them in once a week she would annotate and respond to our discussion of our books, helping us think deeper about the novels we chose to read just for fun. After the first quarter, she began to recommend books to each of us, and many of the ones she recommended to me are books that I still value today. Not only did I find a personal connection in them, but they are special to me because they were suggested to me through someone who understood my reading style. This made a huge difference even though I was already a reader.

This was also a meaningful experience to me because this teacher helped instill in me why English is an important subject. I always loved English in school, but frankly it was what I scored lowest in. I never saw the application for it until I met this teacher. Everyone else was constantly pushing whole-class novels down our throats and asking us to analyze symbols and explain metaphors. None of those related to me. Having a teacher who put an emphasis on reading as a time for confused teenagers to begin to relate to the world around them was comforting and helpful. It made me more willing to view the whole-class novel, literary analysis approach as practice for skills I could use on my own time to further understand the poetry and novels I was reading. And, guess what? It actually worked.

This goes into one of my final points. I am a very different person as a learner than I am as a teacher, something that I've known for a long time now. But, in reaching the end of my education program in college, I've finally begun how to mold those two together and use them to

my benefit. I think every teacher needs to remember what it's like to be a student and to remind themselves that they, in many ways, still are in the roll of a student. I don't envision myself standing in the front of a classroom for many reasons, but one of them is because I think that as teachers we learn just as much from our students as they learn from us, even if some of it is relearning.

At the beginning of my journey I needed to separate my teaching self from my student self in order to develop both separately. I've managed to do so by developing an understanding of how they work together. Every student can be a teacher and every teacher can be a student. The world around us is constantly changing, and it does so rapidly. It's important for everyone to know their place. I believe that mine is in the form of helping others discover their place in society. I want those in my classroom to learn what parts of them are teachers and what parts of them are students and I want them to continue to develop both. I want them to understand that when I say that everyone is a life-long learner, I'm not saying that it's a goal to aspire to, but something they've already accomplished if they continue using the tools we develop in my classroom.

My goals for my students and myself are not that different. I think through teaching I will gain the ability to understand the world better, because I will be constantly trying to help others do the same. In understanding more about the world I will become more receptive to the good things about it, and more aware of how to change the things I don't believe are working well. In other words, I think it is the best way to be a life-long learner and to continue to participate as an acting member of a community and the world.